Training For Distance Learning Teachers©

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Lisa Williamson—Utah Valley University—Summer 2008
Contracted by Utah State Office of Education
George T. W. Miller Jr. Distance Education Training Specialist

A best practice approach to professional development for distance educators is to use the same constructivist inquiry-based methods used in exemplary DE classrooms. Adult learning and development researchers tell us that adults prefer instruction that is self-directed, reflexive, experiential, relevant, solution-oriented, and transformative (learners' biases and assumptions are challenged.) Training must also activate, affirm and build upon prior knowledge and real-world experience and have immediate and practical application. (Merriam,2001; Cranton, 2000). Finally, adult learners need measurable outcomes—for themselves and for their learners (Kelty, 2000).

In Witta's (2000) 4-year study of high school teachers' perceptions of interactive video instruction, she found that it takes about three years before teachers feel really comfortable teaching with IVC technology. Paradoxically, while teachers' comfort with IVC technology increased over this period of time, their willingness to teach remotely again steadily declined. Reasons for this included a lack of time to visit and teach from remote sites (this was the number one complaint), discomfort disciplining remote students, inadequate time for preparation, and difficulty finding a substitute trained in IVC instruction.

10 (Eleven, really) TRAINING TIPS

1. Instructors want and need training (Tallent-Runnells et al., 2007; Kelty, 2002; Barbanell, Falce, and Newman, 2003)

   - Veteran educators of 10 years+ will seek out training/professional development (Harwood and Asal, 2007, p. 96)

- Novice educators (5 years experience or less) mostly likely *will not* take advantage of training (Harwood and Asal, 2007) because they are Digital Natives themselves.

2. Pre-assessment of needs. Are you training those "with no clue, or less than a clue" (Harwood and Asal, 2007, p. 56) or already tech-savvy Digital Natives.

3. Use Project-based Learning /PBL. Create learning communities, train in teams (Kelty, 2002)

   please read: Barbanell, P., Falce, J, & Newman, D. (2003). *New Vision, New Realities: Methodology and Mission in Developing Interactive Videoconferencing Programming*.

   This article provides a template for IVC training and program development between qualified educators and museum staff. I think this could very easily be adapted as a training model. Excellent!

4. Address both Cognitive and Affective domains

   - Affective (values, beliefs, feelings, emotions)

     i. Prepare participants for feeling like novices or beginners all over again. Help them embrace "the discomfort of the unfamiliar" (Collins, 2000, p.5) and using methods that may seem utterly counterintuitive. Feelings of fraudulence ("I don't know what the heck I'm doing!") or that your students are more tech-savvy than you are NORMAL. Developing self-confidence in teachers is is critical (Kelty, 2002).

     ii. Bias. Despite research to the contrary, F2F or "seat time" (Rose as cited in Mupinga, 2005, p. 107; Darabi et al., 2006; Galusha, n.d.) is still the standard for legitimate or *real* learning.

     iii. Attitude. Teachers with enthusiasm for non-traditional coursework are best-suited to teach DE (Kelty, 2002; Galusha, n.d.).

     iv. Shifting roles.
         - Content expert is fine, but as Pape (2005) points out, ***the delivery of that expertise must change.***

- Instructor becomes a *facilitator, partner, co-creator* of knowledge (Kelty, 2002).

- Perceived loss of power/ authority. This can be very threatening.

- Cognitive:
  i. Adopt new pedagogies
     - Collaborative, student-centered learning (Galusha, n.d)
     - Active inquiry
     - Real-life simulations
     - Project-based learning

  ii. Technology Competence
     - Select teachers based on their technological competencies (Durbai et al., 2006; Mupinga, 2005).

5. Design ample time for reflection into training (Collins, 2005; Smyth, 2005; Merriam, 2001; Cranton, 2000).

   TIP: Have participants reflect not only on their practice, but on their primary motivations/philosophies that drive distance instruction:

   - "What does it mean to be a distance teacher?" (Collins, 2005)
   - "Why do I do what I do?" (Smyth, 2005)
   - "What are my personal beliefs about knowing and knowledge acquisition?" (Smyth, 2005, p. 7)

6. *Bottom's up!* Allow participants to work interactively and create much of the context for the training based on their own experiences (or lack thereof) with IVC instruction. Bottom-up design eases technophiles' fears (Harwood and Asal, 2007) and also meets adult learners' need for planning their own learning (Cranton, 2000). Bottom up creation promotes buy-in and better retention.

7. Build a culture of expertise and commitment. “Avoid locking up expertise in a few hands as this generates dependence and inequity” (Lankshear, 2007 p. 114).

    - Have pre-service teachers or new teachers shadow experienced IVC instructors (Trippe, n.d.)
    - Provide monetary incentives for trained teachers who are willing to train other teachers (Kelty, 2002)
    - Train school board members in IVC instruction

8. Speak the language. What motivates your participants?
    - The bottom line: Gains in student performance (Kelty, 2002, p.14).
    - Communication should be driven by professional interests, not technology (www.netc.org).
    - Keep training focused on “student achievement” *and* the skills needed for teaching IVC technology (Kelty, 2002, p. 36).
9. Leave the IT guys at home. Training provided by educators more readily accepted than when offered by technical support staff. There is a sense that a teacher “in the trenches” who actually uses the technology in the classroom is more credible and has a better grasp of the practical applications (Kelty, 2002).
10. Gender matters!

    MEN: Male faculty prefer to observe colleagues teaching at a distance as part of training (Kelty, 2002). Males also report learning and knowing how to teach at a distance is heavily influenced by “prior involvement with extension courses” and hands-on, learning by doing (Armstrong, 2004, p. 8).

WOMEN: Female faculty consider themselves "risk takers" or "techies" (Armstrong, 2004). Their preferred method of training is review videos of themselves teaching remotely (Kelty, 2002).

11. Workshops (Trippe, n.d.)
    - Critical thinking skills
    - Evaluation, grading and feedback
    - Dealing with difficult students
    - Copyright/fair use
    - Writing / CMC
    - Student interaction

Web 2.0 Technologies in the IVC Classroom

Since the inception of DE instruction, the idea that technology should be transparent in relation to instruction has prevailed. That is, the focus in the technology-mediated classroom should remain on the learning taking place, not the razzle and dazzle of the newest technology (Tripp, 2001; Willis and Lockee, 2008; Smyth, 2005). Recent research however challenges this notion of technology transparency. For example, Lankshear (2001) proposes that technologies become active agents or partners in the DE classroom. From this perspective, technologies are considered not as an add-ons or distractions, but as an "active participant" (p. 113) in the distance classroom in partnership with the instructor and the learners. Goldman (2004) argues convincingly that technology can be more than a vehicle for teaching course-specific content. Using digital media technology, Goldman found that when learners and teachers used technology to "think about their thinking" (p. 164) as a learning community, the culture of the classroom transformed into a more equitable space for "gender, race, cultural, and age differences" (p. 164).

Similarly, McMurry (2003) posits that technology becomes truly transformative when it is driven by democratic ideals which favor "personal and social-problem solving, historical perspectives, understanding power relationships, justice and equality, and cultural and human aesthetics" (p. 430).

Clearly, approaching technology from this vantage point may require a huge paradigm shift, but it is a shift that more closely aligns with the lived experienced of today's Net Generation. Lankshear (2004) further notes that today's learners have "great enthusiasm for and enjoyment in learning a sense of comfort, achievement, and confidence . . . around a range of new technologies" (p. 101). Duderstadt (2007) concurs. He aptly observes that to resist technology in the classroom is futile as today's learners have "brought it with them" (p. 235). For the most part, today's generation of tech-savvy learners appear to move effortlessly between technologies; their frustration comes from waiting for us, their instructors, to catch up (Prensky, 2001)! Our job as distance educators is to catch up with new generations of learners for whom technology is no longer transparent but is a very real part of their existence, both inside and outside of the classroom. Adapting Web 2.0 technologies into IVC instruction may help smooth the transition from transparent to transformative.

TIP: When considering incorporating any new instructional technology to improve learning, ask yourself these questions:

- How will this technology help my students learn and help me meet learning objectives?
- What can I do with this technology that I cannot do without it? (Twigg, 2001)

Web 2.0

In layman's terms, Web 2.0 or 2.0 refers to a move away from static web-based or Internet use towards more interactive, dynamic, and democratic participation where end users (in this case, your students) edit, create and contribute content, and interact in social communities (Gutmans, 2006). Increasingly, the interactive nature of Web 2.0 technologies (i.e. wikis, podcasts, blogs, social networking, instant and text messaging, electronic discussion boards, etc.) as a model of "contribution pedagogy" (Collis and Moonen, 2001) have been show to markedly enhance social presence and learner/learner engagement, learner/content engagement, and engagement between learner/instructor. Emerging Web 2.0 strategies are presented here as possible strategies for a best practices model of distance instruction.

Social Presence

No review of distance teaching and learning would be complete without a discussion of social presence in the remote learning environment. Garrison (as cited in Manca and Delfino, 2007) defines social presence as "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as 'real' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used, and most distance education instructors will be intimately familiar with the term. While much of the research on developing and maintaining social presence in the distance learning environment centers on online or web-based learning communities, recent trends indicate that Web 2.0 technologies are being used quite successfully in hybrid IVC environments (Mupinga, 2005; www.warwick.ac.uk) and are gaining wider acceptance. Research suggests that 2.0 technologies not only facilitate collaboration and cooperation (Manca and Delfino, 2007), but increase learner engagement and critical reflection (L'Bahy and Whitehouse, 2002); improve cognition (Mykota and Duncan, 2007; Beldarrian,

2007); promote relationships of reciprocity (Collins, 2000) and move traditional instruction from "independent learning to collective knowing" (McDuffie and Slavit, 2003, p. 6).

If the thought of introducing CMC technology into your IVC classroom seems daunting or even superfluous, remember that today's Net Generation *do not* limit the definition of communication to F2F interaction. Communication for these sophisticated learners is not only a top priority, it is imperative (Oblinger, 2008).

STATS:

- 100% communicate with others every time they log onto
- 70% check IM first thing after logging on

Electronic Discussion Boards

The benefits of incorporating electronic or threaded discussions into your distance instruction are ample. In addition to extending F2F discussion, one of the best rationales for including threaded discussion is that it provides a safe forum for students to participant who might not normally be as active in your onsite or remote classrooms. McDuffie and Slavit (2003) observe that quieter students were recognized and given "prestige" (p. 10) when they were referenced in others' posts. Furthermore, students who typically contribute very little or not at all in the F2F classroom have been shown to contribute *significantly more* in threaded discussions. By providing learners with time to reflect on course material and a virtual forum to contribute to discussions in ways that are meaningful to them, feelings of community are nurtured and self-efficacy is enhanced.

As with most Web 2.0 technologies, monitoring an electronic discussion board requires some skill building. Salmon (as cited in Harris-John, 2003) suggests the technique of "weaving"

(p. 1). Essentially, weaving a threaded discussion involves a single reply to several students based on the topic as well as the relationships created by students' postings. According to Salmon, weaving affords the instructor the opportunity to influence and guide the direction of the discussions, as well as a chance to get to know the students on a more personal level. Weaving is also used to summarize main points proposed at a certain point in the discussion, as well as posing pertinent questions to generate further exploration.

TIP: Group remote site learners with on-site learners to create discussion threads. Each group is responsible for choosing a discussion topic, setting parameters of discussion participation (i.e. number of responses required, dates/times responses due, how long the thread will be active, and how student responses will be graded.)

TIP: Set conventions for topic postings.

- Establish a word limit for posts
- Set up naming conventions for response threads (www.colostate.edu)

TIP: Provide examples of positive feedback or constructive criticism through "model" posts (McDuffie and Slavit, 2003).

CAUTION: Hands off! Too much involvement takes ownership away from students.

Blogs

Blogging is gaining increased attention as an asynchronous means for instruction that supports more mediated group communications (Salmon as cited in Kanuka et. al, 2007), fosters the development of engaged learning communities, and reduces feelings of alienation and isolation in "spatially distant learners" (Dickey, 2004, p. 290). Although research on blogs in DE has focused primarily on web-based learning environments, the technology

suggests easy transferability to the IVC classroom as students *blog across sites*. To date, no definitive research exists to support this claim; more IVC-specific research is would certainly be useful in terms of videoconferenced instruction.

As new technology emerges, new possibilities exist for learning and instruction. Blogging, as a newer technology that has risen out of "youth web-culture" (p. 289) is offered as a pedagogic tool for promoting greater social discourse among distance learners. Due to the "personal and self-revealing aspects of blogs" (Dickey, 2004, p. 288) and student perceptions that blogs are more progressive and perhaps a little "countercultural" (p. 280), Dickey found that students embrace blogs over more traditional discussion group tools (in this case, Blackboard) as a way to socialize, interact and enter into dialogue, elicit peer and instructor support, and express feelings and emotions.

As a form of "citizen journalism" (Oblinger, 2008, p. 15) notes that blogging brings together learners who together create and publish highly-distributed knowledge. True to the constructivist theory of learning, this "bottom up" (p. 15), co-creation of pooled knowledge disrupts the typical "guru of the classroom" (Pape, 2004) or top-down, instructor-driven knowledge dissemination typically found in most K-12 classrooms.

Blogging, as a synergistic, learner-centered instructional approach supports Duderstadt's (2007) position that learning is much more peer-driven than in previous decades due in large part to technology. Through "sophisticated peer networks" (Duderstadt, 2007, p. 234), students are taking more and more control over their learning environment *and* their own learning. Interestingly, Dickey (2004) observed that students who reported feeling isolated at the beginning of the course, later revealed that it was "their own performance" (p.

287) and not the format of the course or specific technology that contributed to these feelings.

As a case in point, Garrett (2006), a professor in the School of Business at Eastern Illinois University, incorporates blogs into his distance courses (web-based) to address "issue-oriented" (p. 2) topics. Blogging in Garrett's courses are free-form, but certainly not a free-for-all. Garrett provides learners with a content-focused topic where students post related opinions and/or positions. Blogging in Professor Garrett's courses includes explicit instruction on issues of privacy, "net neutrality" (p. 2), copyright issues, and proper documentation of sources. ". . . when they [students] see something that's interesting they'll reference it on the blog and they'll put their opinion" (p.2).

Dlott (2007) combines both podcasts (see section on podcasts) and blog technologies as motivational learning tools to enhance learning with K-12 learners. After her students produce their podcasts, they post them on a blog. Dlott feels that blogs provides an authentic and "global" (p. 4) audience for young writers, and that the public nature and visibility of a blog highly is motivating.

TIP: Use blogs to assist students publish work, represent themselves online, interact with their peers as part of an organic community and manage their own digital content and identity http://blogsavvy.net/how-you-should-use-blogs-in-education

TIP: Use blogs as a student portfolio to demonstrate progress, accomplishments, and reflections (Weller as cited in Beldarrain, 2007)

FREEWARE

- Blogger.com
- Blogspot.com

Podcasting

Another form of digital media becoming popular with distance educators is podcasting. A podcast is a digital broadcast that can be downloaded and accessed through an MP3 player or any computer. Griffey (2007) suggests three key concepts to implementing podcasts: creating the content, distributing the podcasts, and aggregating and synching to iPods locally (p. 1). Rationales for podcast are many. They include: 1) teaching to multiple learning styles, 2) allowing for intensive review and skills reinforcement, 3) focusing on curriculum, 4) promoting 21st-century skills, 5) integrating easily into F2F instruction, 6) providing learners with smaller, more digestible chunks of information, and 7) providing content on-demand.

Reynard (2008) calls for new ways of using podcasting technology in the classroom and moving beyond worn-out techniques. Podcasting, according to Reynard, should challenge "conventional notions" (p. 3) of knowledge construction and promote new levels of peer networking and input. Supported by Dlott (2007), Reynard argues that innovative instructors should move beyond the obvious uses of podcasts, and take full advantage of the technology's "public nature" (p. 1) to create collaborative, contribution-oriented communities of highly engaged learners. New uses of podcasts in the classroom should never attempt to recreate the F2F classroom experience but should represent a change in teaching methods and learning outcomes, reflect the essence and capability of the technology itself, and appeal to today's learner.

Not surprisingly, not all educators are sold on podcasting technology. In *Attack of the Pod People,* Schneider (2006) offers a dissenting view in "support of real-time, nonvirtual class sessions" (p. 1). For Schneider, the F2F classroom experience becomes diluted, lacking conviction and style, when instruction is delivered through an iPod broadcast. Instruction

through digital media is reduced to "a thin imitation for real instruction" and "degenerates into mere utterance" (p. 3) rather than meaningful, value-laden instruction. Physical presence or showing up (on both the instructor's part and the student's part) not only indicates one's commitment for the subject matter and one's commitment to learning, but is arguably the only way to transmit "the values that make information worth having" (p.3). Schneider's closing comments reveal the real motivation behind his anti-iPod argument—that technology will be the ultimate demise of the academic, himself included.

TIP: Project Design (Reynard, 2007)

- Students design content based upon study sheets
- Students set up own podcast software & hardware
- Students responsible for design & media used
- Students write a research plan, a content development plan, and a written explanation of their project.

TIP: Students can post (see Blog section) their analysis of podcast topics (Beldarrain, 2007)

TIP: Provide a rubric outlining how podcasts will be critiqued (Dlott, 2007)

Software/Freeware:

- Apple's Garage Band
- iMovie
- Archive.org
- podomatic.com (combines blog & podcasts into one)

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Partners are

Utah State Office of Education—George Miller, Distance Education Specialist

Westminster College—Dr. David Stokes, Education Department

Lisa Williamson—Researcher, Westminster College, Utah Valley University

Morgan School District—Mr. Lyndon Bennett—Multimedia Instructor

Contact:

George T. W. Miller Jr.
Distance Learning Training Specialist K-12
Educational Technology Services
Utah State Office of Education
Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200
801-538-7790 off
801-520-9727 cell
george.miller@schools.utah.gov